

# A new ‘inquisition’? Police reform, urban transparency and house numbering in eighteenth-century Geneva

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**ABSTRACT:** As an administrative tool of police reform, the introduction of house numbering in eighteenth-century Geneva was the result of a broad desire for urban transparency that resulted in the production of a new ‘regime of visibility’. This article examines how the logic of ‘number’ transformed the way in which urban space was conceived, organized and governed. As a political technology, the spatial practice of house numbering enabled governmental officials to divide, count, identify and classify urban populations in order to regulate the spaces of circulation in the modern city. Although the city’s house-numbering system is taken for granted by most of the town-dwellers today, the current study illustrates how these police techniques encountered considerable resistance when they were initially imposed during the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The practice of house numbering was adopted in cities and towns across Europe in the mid-eighteenth century with such rapidity that it is not an exaggeration to regard it as a cornerstone of urban modernity.<sup>1</sup> As a typical product of the Enlightenment, the production of calculable spaces of ‘number’ seduced governmental officials who embraced the abstract order of numerical identification, because it was potentially legible and understandable to all users of urban space, including those least familiar with a given place.<sup>2</sup> The numerical co-ordinates of house-numbering systems indicate and assign a place for individuals and property in the city. Consequently, the street address becomes, like the passport, a medium of personal identity.<sup>3</sup> A commonplace object of everyday life for more than

<sup>1</sup> A. Tantner, *Ordnung der Häuser: Beschreibung der Seelen, Hausnummerierung und Seelenkonskription in der Habsburgermonarchie* (Innsbruck, 2007); R. Rose-Redwood, ‘Indexing the great ledger of the community: urban house numbering, city directories, and the production of spatial legibility’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 34 (2008), 286–310; C. Denys, *Police et sécurité au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans les villes de la frontière franco-belge* (Paris, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> D. Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies: Possession and Identity in Late Medieval Marseille* (Ithaca, 1999).

two centuries, house numbers have become so taken for granted that the history of their emergence has gone largely unexamined. What encouraged the historical development of house numbering and who promoted it? What were its political, economic, and social effects? By examining the case of eighteenth-century Geneva, this article maintains that although house numbering was not part of a pre-defined and homogeneous system of socio-spatial control, the political technologies of street addressing can be traced to a desire for 'transparency' widely shared by the urban elites of the time.

During the Enlightenment, the coming of a new 'regime of visibility' was pervasive in the intellectual, social and political imaginaries of the era. Transparency was a moral and political imperative that philosophers expressed by praising the harmonies of social life.<sup>4</sup> Utopian urban planners celebrated the ideal of the transparent city and sought to 'make clear the reading of the city', thereby expressing an ambition for transparency and an obsession with clarity.<sup>5</sup> Transparency, in short, was a condition of urban modernity, as it enabled the circulation of people and commodities within the modern city, but it also served the governmental purpose of spatially identifying the location of individuals that made up the urban population.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the individual became the subject 'of a searching curiosity which left nothing hidden from the eyes of those in authority'.<sup>7</sup> To divide, count, identify and classify populations in order to control the uncertainty of flows in the city, to 'civilize' behaviour and habits, was an obsession exhibited by many men of the Enlightenment. Among these, city administrators and officials in charge of European police forces were particularly active proponents of such an aspiration, and it can be observed in the street-level policing of the city.

Historians of law and institutions have long monopolized the history of policing in the ancien régime, yet this subfield has recently undergone a significant revival with new insights coming from both qualitative and quantitative historical scholarship.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, the works inspired by Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' have shown how the police of the modern age were part of an apparatus of security underpinned by a series of political technologies that constituted an art of government.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> J. Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris, 1971), 48.

<sup>5</sup> M. Ozouf, 'Architecture et urbanisme: l'image de la ville chez Claude-Nicolas Ledoux', *Annales ESC*, 21 (1966), 1273–304; B. Baczko, *Utopian Lights: The Evolution of the Idea of Social Progress* (New York, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> J.-C. Perrot, *Genèse d'une ville moderne: Caen au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1975), 665; V. Denis, *Une histoire de l'identité: France, 1715–1815* (Seyssel, 2008), 286.

<sup>7</sup> D. Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1987), 271.

<sup>8</sup> V. Milliot, 'Histoire des polices: l'ouverture d'un moment historiographique', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 54 (2007), 162–77; L. Antonielli (dir.), *La polizia in Italia e in Europa: punto sugli studi e prospettive di ricerca* (Soveria Mannelli, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> M. Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population* (Paris, 2004); M. Foucault, 'Omnes et singulatum: vers une critique de la raison politique', in *Dits et écrits*, vol. II: 1976–1988 (Paris, 1981),

On the other hand, pragmatic approaches to the study of social history have focused on the diversity of institutional actors, forms of social action and their inclusion in the public arena to highlight the still provisional construction of the public order. By adopting a relational perspective, these studies highlight not only the diversity of police institutions, but also the constant search for new institutional balance and new techniques of policing.<sup>10</sup>

In eighteenth-century Europe, various strategies of producing spatial transparency, such as street lighting, techniques of law enforcement, house numbering and other practices of identification, were among the strategies that contributed to the institutional strengthening of 'police' and the redefinition of its scope.<sup>11</sup> In the Republic of Geneva, as in many European cities or states, their appearance, or updating, took place in a relatively short time frame. Between 1730 and 1780, a wide range of practices of regulation and control were institutionalized and rationalized at the expense of informal social practices which had previously structured social life. That said, evidence of an apparatus that spread throughout Europe must not obscure the difficulties it encountered, the hesitations and the improvisations that determined its appearance. The case of Geneva, a sovereign city-state described in 1757 as a perfect model of 'administration politique' by the *Encyclopédie*, recalls the complex set of issues associated with house numbering as a technology of power.<sup>12</sup>

### House numbering as a political technology

By the mid-eighteenth century, the city of Geneva, surrounded by impressive fortifications, had an urban population of 22,000 inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> Governing by 'number' was part of the police magistrate's toolbox, as is evident in the records of the *Tribunal du lieutenant*.<sup>14</sup> Yet, the numbering of

953–80; P. Lascombes, 'La gouvernementalité: de la critique de l'État aux technologies du pouvoir', *Le Portique*, 13–14 (2004), 169–89; P. Napoli, *Naissance de la police moderne: pouvoirs, normes, société* (Paris, 2003); H. L'Heuillet, *Basse politique, haute police: une approche historique et philosophique de la police* (Paris, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> V. Milliot, *Un policier des Lumières* (Seyssel, 2011); J.-M. Berlière et al., *Métiers de police: être policier en Europe, XVIIIe–XXe siècle* (Rennes, 2008); Denys, *Police et sécurité*; L. Antonielli, 'Gli uomini della polizia e l'arruolamento', in *La polizia in Italia nell'età moderna* (Soveria Mannelli, 2002), 117–36.

<sup>11</sup> V. Milliot, 'Réformer les polices en Europe au siècle des Lumières', *Francia*, 37 (2010), 435–51; C. Denys, B. Marin and V. Milliot (eds.), *Réformer la police: les mémoires policiers en Europe au XVIIIe siècle* (Rennes, 2009); L. Antonielli, 'Les réformes de la police en Lombardie au XVIIIe siècle', in B. Bernard (ed.), *Lombardie et Pays-Bas autrichiens, regards croisés sur les Habsbourg et leurs réformes au XVIIIe siècle. Études sur le XVIIIe siècle* (Brussels, 2008), 161–81.

<sup>12</sup> For general context, M. Cicchini, *La police de la République: l'ordre public à Genève au XVIIIe siècle* (Rennes, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> A. Perrenoud, *La population de Genève, du seizième au début du dix-neuvième siècle* (Geneva, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> The *Tribunal du lieutenant* is chaired by the *lieutenant* which is assisted by six *auditeurs*. About the *Tribunal du lieutenant* and its police role: M. Cicchini, 'Être magistrat de police en République, ou apprendre à gouverner', in Berlière et al., *Métiers de police*, 45–59.

houses was not a major focus of governmental administration. In 1758, the judges were rather concerned about the inflows of foreign woodcutters. To identify 'trustworthy' woodcutters, an *auditeur* suggested requiring each of them to wear a 'public sign' whose number would be recorded in a book overseen by the judges.<sup>15</sup> After being repeatedly rejected, the proposal was finally adopted a decade later.<sup>16</sup> From 1769 onwards, the woodcutters were numbered and registered (by name and age). To recognize them easily, police magistrates recommended that each wear 'on his coat a tin sign displaying the number . . . , without the liberty to exchange it or give it to another'.<sup>17</sup> The woodcutters, however, viewed the affixing of a number on their clothes as degrading and sought a relief measure that allowed for the sign to be hidden in their pocket, but the easels and the saw still had to be numbered and registered.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1760s, the carts and carriages that congested the streets were also the subject of numerical control, like the Parisian regulation in force since 1734.<sup>19</sup> In 1761, the *auditeur* Perrinet des Franches suggested that wagons be numbered in order 'to recognize who owns the carts of those who [cause] any damage or [violation] in any way connected to the police observed at the port timber'.<sup>20</sup> When this measure was adopted, the numbering was also accompanied by the registration of each of the carriages authorized in the timber transport.<sup>21</sup> Two years later, in order to identify those who drove their carts too quickly, in contravention of urban traffic regulations, the drivers were ordered to place their number not only on the carts, but on the horse collar as well.<sup>22</sup>

One characteristic of such numbering schemes was their capacity to organize spaces according to the dictates of calculative reason. Thus, the identification of different retail outlets and the assignment of locations to merchants by numbering them became an administrative device to achieve the urban 'good policy'. From 1780, the *Tribunal du lieutenant* sought to overcome the confusion that reigned in the timber market by way of numerical identification. The magistrates complained that 'the places where the wood is exposed for sale are not distinguished from each other', adding that 'everything is mixed up and confused around

<sup>15</sup> Archives d'État de Genève (AEG), Jur. Pen. I2 10, 22 Oct. 1758, 13: 'Une marque publique'.

<sup>16</sup> AEG, Jur. Pen. I2 10, 8 Jan. 1759, 24; *idem*, 20 Nov. 1759, 60; *idem*, 21 Sep. 1765, 353–4; 24 Jan. 1769, 522.

<sup>17</sup> AEG, 13 Mar. 1769, Placard 196: 'Une marque de fer blanc contenant le numéro . . . sur son habit, sans qu'il lui soit loisible de l'échanger ou de la remettre à un autre.'

<sup>18</sup> AEG, Jur. Pen. I2 10, 26 May 1769, 553, Jur. Pen. I2 11, 24 Nov. 1772, 119.

<sup>19</sup> N. Delamare (Lecler du Brillet), *Traité de la police*, 4 (Paris, 1738), 457.

<sup>20</sup> AEG, Jur. Pen. I2 10, 22 Aug. 1761, 164: 'Pour reconnaître à qui appartiennent les chariots de ceux qui [causent] quelque dommage ou [contreviennent] en quelque autre manière à la police qui s'observe au port du bois.'

<sup>21</sup> In 1781, *auditeur* Léonard Bourdillon notes that there are 25 carts in the port 'numérotés au derrière, sur une plaque de fer blanc': Bibliothèque de Genève, MS suppl. 1116, fol. 24r.

<sup>22</sup> AEG, Jur. Pen. I2 10, 10 Jun. 1763, 261: 'Les places dans lesquelles le bois est exposé ne sont point distinguées les unes des autres' . . . 'Tout est mêlé et confondu sur le port dans un espace nu et uniforme.'

the port in a bare and uniform space'.<sup>23</sup> Wishing to introduce rapidly 'an order and a police' to provide a remedy for the disorder in the port area, the magistrates compartmentalized specific spaces for the sale of timber and numbered them, recording each merchant's place in a register. In 1788, the system was extended to greengrocers. To avoid the obstruction of the main artery of the lower city and to liberate the passageways, spaces for greengrocers were introduced into Fusterie and Molard Squares.<sup>24</sup> An *auditeur* allocated the places to the merchants, numbered them (1 to 54 and 1 to 34, respectively), and recorded them on sale licences. Numbered stones were stuck into the ground and the numerical grid was then transcribed on a special register.<sup>25</sup>

The police magistrates of the Republic demonstrated a keen interest in spatial partitioning and identification by numbers, but they did not envisage at any time the numbering of houses, at least officially. The idea only appeared in 1782, when a foreign officer suggested that houses be numbered in the context of political turmoil. In September of that year, Charles Leopold de Jaucourt, a French field marshal, came to pacify the revolutionary upheavals of the bourgeois opposition struggling against the political monopoly of the conservative oligarchy, together with the Bernese and Sardinian troops. On this occasion, one strategy that was adopted to contend with the opposition was to number the houses of the city to track people's whereabouts. The quartering of troops was not the reason for this measure, because the thousands of soldiers who occupied the Republic were quickly installed in makeshift barracks in the Fusterie Church, the wheat granary of Chantepoulet, the College and the Lutheran church, all of which were easily identifiable without the aid of house numbers.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, de Jaucourt only justified the numbering of houses in terms of 'keeping order'. As the *Petit Conseil*, whose authority was restored through the intervention of foreign armies, had no reason to oppose this practice, house numbering was accepted and the Republican authorities entrusted the *syndic de la garde* to its implementation.<sup>27</sup>

### **Insert and delete: between resistance and accommodation**

Having been endorsed without debate by the *Petit Conseil*, the measure was applied immediately. First, two professional painters, who carried out this job for the first time in their lives, wrote the names of the streets on the walls of the buildings – previously, the city's residents had certainly made use of street names, yet these names were not generally posted as

<sup>23</sup> AEG, Jur. Pen. I2 11, 27 Jun. 1780, annexe 401. We only have evidences showing that it has been realized before Dec. 1783: Jur. Pen. I2 12, 29 Nov. 1783, 114.

<sup>24</sup> AEG, RC cop. 292, 20 Jun. 1788, 509–10.

<sup>25</sup> AEG, Jur. Pen. I2 13, 23 Sep. 1788, 137–9, 17 Apr. 1789, 191–3.

<sup>26</sup> E. Chapuisat, *La prise d'armes de 1782 à Genève* (Geneva, 1932), 154.

<sup>27</sup> AEG, RC 283, 17 Sep. 1782, 367.

part of a street signage system. Depending on the length of the street, the painters might write the name at intervals up to six times. In all, 222 new inscriptions covered the city walls.<sup>28</sup> With this completed, the painters began to inscribe specific numbers upon each building. They began by drawing a blank cartouche in which they recorded the numbers, of which there were 1,017 for the entire city. The private houses in the walled city were each to receive a number, but not public buildings. Apart from the arsenal, public buildings (Townhouse, General Hospital, central market, poor houses, churches, public granaries, butchers, the diplomatic house of the permanent French minister and guard houses) were all exempted from numbering.<sup>29</sup>

The chief question was not only which type of buildings should be numbered, but also what calculative techniques to employ in the numbering process itself in order to ensure the logical sequence of numerical 'order'. Although no records survive to indicate the intentions of the *syndic de la garde*, it is clear that a precise plan had been adopted. Not by accident, the magistrate chose the logic of numbering houses by neighbourhood. This was the method prescribed by the *Ordonnance pour régler le service dans les places*, which had been in force in the armies of the French monarchy since 1768.<sup>30</sup> Starting at one end of the quarter, the numbers were lined up one after another, embracing the urban topography, and followed the contours of the streets in order to complete the numerical series near the point of departure. The district of the Townhouse received 277 house numbers, that of Saint-Gervais 257, that of Rive 188 and the district of the Bourg-de-four received 295. The highest number faced the first, as recommended by the military ordinances.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the streetwise form of house numbering (as in Paris), or the numbering of houses by blocks (as in Madrid or Mannheim), the logic of numbering houses by district was distinguished by a 'lower' legibility of urban space.<sup>32</sup> However, such a method of numbering strengthened the identity of the neighbourhood because the streets that composed it were then connected to each other by a long string of numbers. The choice of administrative divisions of the city was therefore quite significant. In this case, the *syndic de la garde* used the four districts that had structured the organization of the bourgeois militia since at least the sixteenth century. Other subdivisions of the city, overlaid on this, existed and could have been used instead, like the 6 police districts or the 29 *dizaines*. The choice of the militia quarter as a territorial division for house numbering is curious, because, at the same time, the *compagnies bourgeoises* were about to be removed by the

<sup>28</sup> AEG, Finances W 122, parcelle n°41, 4–10 Oct. 1782, accounts of Voirin and Champod.

<sup>29</sup> AEG, Recensement A10.

<sup>30</sup> This normative corpus of the French monarchy inspired republican military orders in 1783 and 1787.

<sup>31</sup> *Ordonnance pour régler le service dans les places et dans les quartiers du premier Mars 1768*, titre V, art. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Tantner, *Ordnung der Häuser*, 65.



*Édit de pacification* of November 1782. Did they want to fix the memory of a threatened military institution into the fabric of the urban landscape itself?<sup>33</sup> Was this way of partitioning the city chosen for its simplicity? In the absence of debate and discussion that would require the *syndic de la garde* to justify these choices, such questions remain unanswered.

As an administrative measure, house numbering immediately faced popular resistance, which forced the authorities to justify publicly the usefulness of the apparatus. Thus, a police ordinance posted in the town promoted the benefits of house numbering, 'whether for the ordinary exercise of the police, or for individuals'.<sup>34</sup> The effect of this ordinance, however, was contrary to that expected by the magistrates. The urban clamour rose again and acts of resistance multiplied. Between 21 and 22 October 1782, nearly 150 numbers that had already been painted on the houses were erased, despite the deployment at night of military patrols which were given the task of preventing sabotage of the house-numbering operation.<sup>35</sup> Concentrated in two areas, the topography of resistance intersected with the urban settlement of the bourgeois opposition. The painters were then forced to reinscribe, completely or in part, one third of the numbers of the Saint-Gervais quarter (81 of 257). Similarly, they redid 59 numbers in the popular streets of the lower city, between the district of Rive and that of Bourg-de-four.<sup>36</sup>

Seeking to assert its authority, the *Petit Conseil* prosecuted the troublemakers as criminals. Above all, it sought to investigate the conspiracy of what we might call 'inscriptive erasure' that had occurred. However, the few perpetrators arrested and interrogated were only isolated actors who adopted very different attitudes in front of the judges. A 58-year-old woman vehemently denied her guilt, despite three witnesses for the prosecution.<sup>37</sup> By contrast, a merchant woman of 61 years, living in the lower portion of the city, acknowledged without hesitation that she had erased the white cartouche that had been painted on her house. During the interrogation, she justified her action by complaining that it was already enough to have the name of the street inscribed on her house. If authorities were to add 'this number', she said, it 'will seem to be in an inquisition'.<sup>38</sup> Between denial and recognition of the alleged facts,

<sup>33</sup> In favour of this hypothesis, it is worth recalling that a first version of the edict provided for the rehabilitation of the bourgeois militia after a 10-year ban. Versailles, considering the *compagnies bourgeoises* as centre of subversion and fearing for the stability of the Republic, imposed the definitive article on the abolition of militias. AEG, RC 283, annexe 704, 'Analyse de l'ouvrage de la commission', 1; PH 5131 bis; Isaac Cornuau, *Mémoires* (1912), 409–10.

<sup>34</sup> AEG, R publ. 6, 21 Oct. 1782, 273: 'Soit pour l'exercice ordinaire de la police, soit pour les particuliers.'

<sup>35</sup> AEG, MS hist. 215, 21 Oct. 1782, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Finances W 122, parcelle n° 46 (8–14 Nov. 1782), accounts of Luxembourg and consorts.

<sup>37</sup> AEG, PC 13966, 22–5 Oct. 1782.

<sup>38</sup> AEG, PC 13967, 'Réponses personnelles', Françoise Jouard, 23 Oct. 1782: 'Avec ce numéro, il lui semblera être dans une inquisition.'

most people took a more nuanced position. Many defendants admitted to erasing their house number, but they insisted that they did so only because they had heard a rumour circulating which suggested that the *Petit Conseil* itself had renounced the practice of house numbering.<sup>39</sup> The sentences against the saboteurs were ultimately rather lenient given the severity promised by the police ordinances (whereby the erasers would be considered seditious). The sentences varied between fines of 50 to 100 florins, coupled with a penalty of imprisonment for up to 15 days in jail.<sup>40</sup>

As in Strasbourg, where the citizens considered house numbering as the manumission of military power over the city,<sup>41</sup> or the Habsburg Empire where the numbering of houses was the target of rebellion against conscription,<sup>42</sup> Geneva's population was wary of a measure that intruded into the everyday life of the urban community and affected its spatial identity. As this device was a requirement of a French officer, for some bourgeois it represented a violation of the 'independence of the state'.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the French soldiers who occupied the Republic supported the work of painters through their presence in the streets. Thus, a citizen suspected of stirring up popular resistance to the numbering process had the painful experience of having to accommodate 30 royal fusiliers. De Jaucourt imposed this arbitrary measure without seeking authorization from the republic's magistrates.<sup>44</sup>

Opposition to the identification of houses by numbers was also informed by anti-state sentiments, because it was perceived as a violation of the 'right of private property'.<sup>45</sup> House numbering provoked discontent because it was regarded as a monitoring device that affected the 'dignity' of persons by replacing 'traditional' identities, which had long been socially recognized, with an anonymous numerical sign. It equalized the spatial codification of identity – expressing 'an air of equality' in the city, according to Louis-Sébastien Mercier – by requiring that everyone, whatever his rank, must be subject to 'common law'.<sup>46</sup> Yet, the introduction of house numbering in Geneva was opposed by numerous ordinary urban residents, some of whom denounced the measure as an 'inquisition'.<sup>47</sup>

The protest against the numbering of houses did not last long, however. In Geneva itself, no more sabotage was reported after the autumn of 1782. In June 1783, presumably to facilitate the collection of taxes, the *Petit Conseil* extended the practice of house numbering to the territory at large, which, surprisingly, was met without any major protest, despite

<sup>39</sup> AEG, PC 13970, 23–5 Oct. 1782.

<sup>40</sup> A qualified worker employed by the state earned about 50 florins per month.

<sup>41</sup> Denis, *Une histoire de l'identité*, 287 and 392.

<sup>42</sup> Tantner, *Ordnung der Häuser*.

<sup>43</sup> AEG, RC 283, 23 Oct. 1782, 416.

<sup>44</sup> AEG, RC 283, 21 and 24 Oct. 1782, 412 and 420.

<sup>45</sup> AEG, RC 283, 23 Oct. 1782, 416.

<sup>46</sup> J. Pronteau, *Les numérotages des maisons* (Paris, 1966), 86; Perrot, *Genève d'une ville moderne*, 666.

<sup>47</sup> AEG, PC 13967, 'Réponses personnelles', Françoise Jouard, 23 Oct. 1782.



official fears.<sup>48</sup> The extent to which the production of urban territory as a space of calculability had become widespread and generally accepted is evident in the fact that advertisers of the *Feuille d'avis de Genève* used house numbers without much scruple. Of all the advertisements that contained an indication of street address at the time, only 28 per cent were labelled with a house number in January 1783. This figure increased to 39 per cent by December of that year and 50 per cent in December 1788. The patronymic and approximated designation of houses and apartments for rent or for sale diminished during this same period ('*maison Pallard*', '*maison Claparede*', 'in front of the residence of France'). However, although the numerical designations increased, some locations still used older forms of identification as well ('at no. 131 to the Pelliserie', '*maison Girod*, after *les Etuves*, no. 128'). House numbering, which had originally been taken from a foreign military model and introduced into an exceptional political context, had finally been permanently adopted in the city of Geneva. The system of numbering by neighbourhood introduced in 1782 survived four political regimes, from the Old Regime until the radical government in the mid-nineteenth century. Initial resistance rapidly transformed into consent and, if not with enthusiastic endorsement, then at least a resigned acceptance that house numbering would become one of the primary mechanisms of spatial organization in the modern city.

### Urban transparency and police techniques

In 1779, when confronting the alleged proliferation of a migrant population to which they attributed all sorts of evils (begging, crime, burglary), the police magistrates of the Republic were alarmed at how these individuals fell outside the 'eye of the police'.<sup>49</sup> This metaphor illustrated the desire to make visible not only those on the margins of urban society, as people of flesh and bone, but also the disorders with which they were associated.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the authorities sought to establish further the spatial transparency of social space.

In its first sense, the word transparent means 'see-through', the capacity for light to pass through a material or an object. During the Enlightenment, however, the term acquired more of a figurative meaning in French, indicating that which 'does not hide anything'.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the ambition of the police magistrates is illustrative of a process of unveiling: to extirpate the foreigners from the condition of urban anonymity that protected them. 'Disorder' was that which escaped the official gaze, what was beyond knowledge or recognition. Police administrators aspired to institutionalize

<sup>48</sup> AEG Militaire A1, 4 Jun. 1783, 144.

<sup>49</sup> M. Cicchini, 'La république transparente? Un projet de quadrillage policier à Genève autour de 1779', in Denys, Marin and Milliot (eds.), *Réformer la police*, 21–45.

<sup>50</sup> L'Heuillet, *Basse politique*; M. Stolleis, *L'œil de la loi: histoire d'une métaphore* (Paris, 2004), 79.

<sup>51</sup> *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (1994), 'Transparence', 2156.

forms of surveillance, seeking to invent new tools and new agents of state control capable of replacing the old forms of social recognition. The desire to renew the modalities of transparency expressed by police magistrates in Geneva was not isolated; rather, it was also exhibited in other places and for other reasons by judges, administrators and philosophers seeking to reform the city police.<sup>52</sup>

The *Mémoire sur la réformation de la police de France* is exemplary in this respect. Around 1749, an officer of the *maréchaussée* in the Île de France, Guillotte (or Guillaute), devised a complete system of urban signs – numbering of quarters, streets, homes, wagons and carts. All of these numerical co-ordinates were then recorded in a central register that Guillotte, as a skilled and innovative engineer, described with great accuracy. Finally, once these proposals had been implemented, he predicted the day would come when the magistrate would know more things about a citizen than would his or her very nearest neighbours.<sup>53</sup>

From the aspirations of the Genevan magistrates seeking to strengthen the ‘eye of the police’ to Guillotte’s utopian dream of the rational city, the same ideal of a transparent urban order framed conceptions of urban structure and spatial form. In the case of Geneva, the growing power of military institutions and the rise of security as a priority for government played a crucial role in the reformulation of ‘police’ during the Enlightenment era. The numbering of houses was one of the primary ways in which this new regime of visibility reconfigured urban space based upon a specific ‘art of distribution’. Yet, as a police apparatus, it did not simply enable a ‘faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception’.<sup>54</sup> The police – which was far from being a homogeneous entity – was not in a transcendent position above society, nor did it impose its will on anonymous and inert subjects. On the contrary, the establishment of public order, then as now, was a very fragile affair that was subject to potential subversion, contestation and reformulation as multiple social actors vied to shape the spaces of the city to serve their own ‘convenient ends’.

<sup>52</sup> Denys, *Police et sécurité*, 414; C. Denys and V. Milliot, *Les espaces policiers*, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 50, 1 (2003); V. Milliot (ed.), *Écriture et pratiques policières du siècle des Lumières au Second Empire* (Rennes, 2006); Denys, Marin and Milliot (eds.), *Réformer la police*.

<sup>53</sup> J. Sez nec (ed.), *Mémoire sur la réformation de la police de France. Soumis au roi en 1749 par M. Guillaute* (Paris, 1974), 47: the magistrate ‘saura plus de choses sur le compte d’un citoyen, quel qu’il soit, que n’en savent ses voisins’.

<sup>54</sup> M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris, 1975), 248: ‘regard sans visage qui transforme tout le corps social en un champ de perception’.